

Easy Answers and New Understandings

Gerald had been looking forward to going abroad for attending an international trade fair with his company. It was an important event for their business, bringing together companies and professionals from several countries. Gerald was particularly interested in meeting potential partners and learning more about how businesses in other parts of the world worked.

The first problems began before he even arrived.

Gerald had contacted the fair's organising team several times with questions about his company's registration. He needed confirmation of their booth number and information about setting up their exhibition materials. However, the organisers took a long time to answer his emails. When they finally responded, their answers were brief and did not always address all his questions.

Gerald became increasingly frustrated. He had deadlines to meet and needed reliable information to prepare for the event. Then, shortly before the fair, he discovered that there was a problem with his company's registration. Some of the information had been entered incorrectly, and Gerald was asked to submit parts of the registration again.

By now, he was genuinely annoyed. He had already spent too much time trying to sort out what he considered a simple administrative matter. As he went through the registration process for a second time, he began looking for an explanation.

The organising team came from a different cultural background, and Gerald started connecting their behaviour with what he believed he knew about that culture. Perhaps, he thought, people there simply had a less organised approach to administration. Maybe they did not take deadlines as seriously as he did. The slow replies and registration problems began to seem like signs of a cultural difference.

When Gerald finally arrived at the international fair, however, his expectations were challenged.

The organising team was friendly and welcoming. They helped him find his company's booth, showed him where to collect his materials, and made sure that he knew where everything was. When Gerald had a question about the exhibition schedule, a member of the team immediately helped him.

Throughout the day, Gerald noticed how busy the organisers were. They were helping exhibitors, answering questions, solving technical problems, coordinating presentations, and dealing with unexpected changes. There seemed to be something happening everywhere.

During a conversation with one of the organisers, Gerald learned more about what had happened in the weeks before the fair. Several companies had changed their registrations at short notice. Some exhibitors had requested different booth arrangements, while technical problems had affected parts of the registration system. The organising team had also received far more requests than expected.

Suddenly, the earlier problems looked different to Gerald.

He realised that he had been too quick to connect the mistakes with the organisers' cultural background. The delayed emails and registration problems had frustrated him, but they did not necessarily tell him anything about the culture of the people who had organised the fair.

There were many other possible explanations. The organisers had been under pressure, dealing with technical difficulties and unexpected changes. They may simply have been overwhelmed by the amount of work they had to do.

Gerald also thought about his own company. His colleagues had organised events before, and he remembered how stressful those situations could become. Emails sometimes went unanswered for days. Information was occasionally entered incorrectly. Plans changed at the last minute, and even well-organised teams made mistakes when they had too many things to deal with at once.

The same thing could easily have happened to his own team if they had been responsible for organising such a large international fair. Gerald still remembered how frustrated he had been before the event. But he now understood that his frustration had encouraged him to search for a cultural explanation before considering other possibilities.

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